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World's Student Christian Federation.
European Student Relief Series No. 2.

“OVERHEARD IN THE COLLEGES.”

1. “Aren't the reports of student destitution in Central Europe greatly exaggerated?”

“No! and they cannot be!” is the answer of every responsible investigator. Military Missions, Reparation Committees, and Red Cross Societies of many different nations, Statesmen like A. J. Balfour, Government Directors of Relief like Hoover and Sir William Goode, High Commissioners in Central Europe all give the same verdict. It is summed up in the Report of Mr. W. F. Persons, Director of Organisation, League of Red Cross Societies, to Sir David Henderson, K.C.B., Director-General, April 8th, 1920:—

“There is appalling misery in the broad belt lying between the Baltic and the Black Sea—misery greater in extent and intensity than the modern world has ever before witnessed. In this great area, including the new Baltic States, Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Ukraine, Austria, Hungary, Roumania, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia—to say nothing of Russia to the East and Armenia to the South—there is generally an absolute lack of medicines and sanitary appliances; doctors, nurses, and hospital equipment are practically non-existent; food and clothing are insufficient to make life itself tolerable, and disease, bereavement and suffering are present in practically every household. When this has been said and understood the story has been told.”

The students suffer with the rest, but up to the present have been neglected by the various relief agencies.

2. “Isn't all we can do a mere drop in the bucket?”

Would you fancy this argument against relief, if you chanced to be the individual, who might be saved from starvation by an effort, even if inadequate. As a matter of fact, a few Universities, working hard at it, have already accomplished a good deal. The first two months of the work of our Relief Scheme in Vienna, amongst a student population of 20,000, resulted in:—

Daily cocoa and bread breakfast for	3107 students.
Clothing outfits	670 women students.
“ “ “	167 men students.
Students sent abroad for agricultural purposes.	90 men
Extra supplies to 3 Student Mensae or Homes.	
Organisation and supply of food for	3 Summer Camps.

3. **“Relief is a mere palliative: nothing but credit and raw materials can restore the economic life of Central Europe. What are the Governments doing?”**

Quite true! But while Government Reconstruction Schemes get under way, the people they are to benefit must be kept alive. Government and humanitarian schemes must supplement each other.

Sir William Goode, British Director of Relief, writing under date May 10th, says:—

“A humanitarian link is now being forged in Paris between the Allied and Associated Powers, and those powers who remained neutral during the war, in order to provide the more destitute countries with just enough food to avert starvation, and with some raw materials. This attempt to breathe life into otherwise inanimate countries cannot, of itself, restore individual initiative or assuage individual suffering. Credits by Governments to Governments are necessarily impersonal. In a crisis such as this there must be behind the impersonal a living, breathing spirit of individual humanitarianism which will bring home to the peoples now in despair the conviction that we do not regard them merely as pawns on a chess-board of inevitable sacrifice.”

4. **“Why don't the students work?”**

A. They *do*; the great majority are earning all they can. But none can support themselves completely. Competition is so great, and unemployment so universal, that students are forced to take absurd fees for their work.

In Vienna. The bare minimum on which a woman student can live (without any allowance whatever for clothes or emergencies) is 500 crowns per month. The utmost she can earn is 300 crowns per month, and few can earn so much.

In Budapest. The bare minimum on which a student can live (allowing for only two meals a day, and nothing for clothes) was 1,032 crowns in June, 1920, and is now considerably higher: the usual monthly income a student can earn is 620 crowns, and 45 % of the wage-earning students have to help support parents or relatives. 42 % of the students are wage-earning; 58 % are not; in the vast majority of cases because they cannot find employment. There are several hundred thousand unemployed in Budapest to-day.

Manual labour is impossible for many, because long continued undernourishment has sapped their strength. Of the first 75 men who volunteered for a wood-cutting Camp in Austria, 29 were rejected as physically unfit.

B. Our Relief Schemes for students are administered with the greatest care. No student is helped with food or clothes without the strictest investigation of his physical and financial condition, and the possibility of his helping himself. We are aiming first and foremost at encouraging self-help on sound economic lines.

5. **“Why don't they leave the Universities and get out into the economic life of the country?”**

Reports received from the Universities show that in every land many thousands are doing this very thing, leaving unfinished the courses they have begun and starting on other lines. Our Relief Schemes

include plans for getting students back to the land through agricultural training, and other plans for providing them with permanent non-professional careers. We are avoiding all action which would encourage men or women to swell the overcrowded professional classes, or the ranks of students who have no chance of future employment.

But the problem is *not* a simple one. The Trades Unions are against the entrance of the "intellectuals" into their ranks. To get a job as waiter or barber, a student must be admitted into the Waiters' or Barbers' Union. The country is up against the city. Farmers refuse to employ students as harvesters: foresters refuse to instruct students in wood-cutting. The number of unemployed is enormous; the exchange, lack of transport, raw material and credit makes everything abnormal. When the economic life of a country is completely disorganised "to get out into it" is a difficult process. In the countries of the Old World, even in peace time, there was no room for an unskilled half-time worker like the student.

The fact must not be lost sight of that to suppress the University-trained man altogether would be a disaster for the economic life of any country. Healthy economic functioning demands a certain proportion of University-trained men and women, doctors, teachers, engineers, architects, sociologists, political economists, etc.

6. Is it true that there are thousands of foreign students in Vienna, Budapest, Prague and Berlin? "Why should we feed them?"

Yes! It *is* true, but N.B.

1. Large numbers of the so-called "foreign" students in Vienna were not *foreign* when they began their course. They are Czechs, Poles, Jugo-Slavs, etc., who were Austrian subjects before the division of the Austrian Empire, and are finishing their course where they began it. In Budapest there are many hundreds of Hungarian students, whose homes are in territories ceded to other countries: they are completely cut off from home through frontier regulations, and are worse off than many real foreign students.

2. Many of these "foreign" students are from countries which are clamouring for doctors and engineers, but in some of which no complete medical or engineering faculties exist. In Galician Poland to-day, there is only one doctor to every 150,000 inhabitants and 250,000 cases of typhus! In Servia and Bulgaria there are no complete medical schools, and a terrible need of doctors.

3. Vienna's very distress attracts the foreign students to her. Students from S.E. Europe and the Balkans are from countries where the exchange is bad; they *can* study in Vienna, where it is even worse, but not in France, Switzerland, Britain, or even Germany.

4. Large numbers of the foreign students in Vienna, Budapest, and Berlin are refugees, driven in through war or revolution, *e.g.*, Galician or Hungarian Jews.

7. "Why a special effort of students for students? Why not an effort of men and women for men and women?"

A. An effort of "men and women" for "men and women" is probably ideal, and capable of making a strong appeal. But we must concern ourselves with practical politics: it is too late: for better for

worse, relief work in Central Europe is stratified, both as regards appeal and administration: and to hold up relief work in order to reorganise it would mean the murder of hundreds of thousands. The various relief missions have already selected the field, or the class, to which they will give—orphans, widows, disabled officers, invalid children, etc. Doctors are appealed to for Doctors, Engineers for Engineers, Labourers for Labourers, and so forth. Why not students for students? Very careful investigation has shown that they are a neglected class. Much, though not nearly enough, has been done for children, something for school boys and girls, *nothing* for students over eighteen.

8. "But students can do so little?"

Try them and see! Students, though usually poor, have money-raising power. A single Dutch student, in two weeks' work, April, 1920, raised nearly £3,000 of goods from various merchants for Vienna students. Students in the Universities of the U.S.A., in 1917-18, raised well over £300,000 for a Students' Friendship Fund, expended on Prisoners of War, social work amongst soldiers and sailors at home and abroad, etc. The huge German Student Self-Help Association (Allgemeine Studentenausschüsse) has introduced a self-denying ordinance, whereby every member whose income is more than 400 marks a month shall tax himself 2 per cent. of his income for the benefit of poorer members. This, in English money, means that every student with an income of more than £32 per annum would tax himself 13/- for student relief. If every student in more fortunate countries would give at this rate, the financial side of the problem of student relief would rapidly be solved!

9. Why should the World's Student Christian Federation tackle this job?

One of the aims of the Federation is to "further, either directly or indirectly, those efforts on behalf of students in body, mind, and spirit which are in harmony with the Christian purpose." Relief work seems to the Federation a plain Christian duty. Members of the Federation took a leading part in organising the "Prisoners of War" work on both sides, that has had such far-reaching results. The present homeless, foodless, clothesless condition of students constitutes a call to the Federation quite as pressing as the need of the Prisoners of War, and, if possible, even closer to its genius. "I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in; naked, and ye clothed Me . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me."

This leaflet is intended for the use of National Student Movements and Committees engaged in Student Relief work. It is meant to serve as a basis for the production of national Student Relief literature, rather than for general distribution.

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